



CACREP Guiding Statement

Guiding Statement on Variation in Accredited Programs

Rationale

Counselor education programs sometimes wish to incorporate focused, curricular options referred to as concentrations or emphasis areas, that can be completed as part of the program of study in a CACREP-accredited specialized practice area (e.g., Clinical Mental Health Counseling with a concentration in College Counseling or Clinical Mental Health Counseling with an emphasis in Art Therapy). These concentrations or emphasis areas may be inspired by workforce demand, faculty areas of expertise, a desire to distinguish a program from programs at other institutions, or other factors. Although CACREP does not prohibit such concentrations and instead encourages innovation, it is important to provide guidance to programs to ensure accuracy of advertising and clear communication to students and employers about the scope of CACREP accreditation. While CACREP understands that concentrations or emphasis areas have their benefits for clients, students, and programs, they are not a component of what CACREP reviews and accredits. Therefore, care must be exercised in accurately conveying this distinction in relation to CACREP accreditation.

Foundational Principles

The following related policies and standards provide guidance to programs wishing to incorporate concentrations or emphasis areas into their CACREP-accredited programs.

Policy A.2.a - CACREP-accredited programs must market themselves in a manner that clearly identifies them as counseling programs in alignment with CACREP standards and policies.

Policy A.2.b - CACREP expects programs to accurately represent their accredited programs.

Policy A.2.g- CACREP encourages programs to be innovative – concentrations, emphasis areas, or other similar methods that enable students to complete focused areas of study as a supplement to their specialized practice area program coursework can help them develop targeted knowledge or skills.

Standard 1.Z.- Core counselor education program faculty participate in professional activities, scholarly activities, and service to the profession. All core counselor education faculty must identify with the counseling profession through each of the following: (1) sustained memberships in professional counseling organizations, (2) relevant professional counseling credentials and (3) evidence of sustained professional engagement through at least two of the following: (a) professional development and renewal activities related to counseling, (b) professional service and advocacy in counseling, (c) ongoing counseling practice, or (d) research and scholarly activity in counseling commensurate with their faculty role.

Guiding Statement

The CACREP Board recognizes the unique qualities of institutions that help shape counselor education programs. The Board encourages the development of counselor education programs that align with institutional missions and values, address local needs, and support the development of unique or targeted skill sets. At the same time, the Board expects all accredited programs to promote a clear professional counselor identity and to accurately communicate their accreditation status. When designing counselor education programs that include a concentration, emphasis area, or track within a CACREP-accredited specialized practice area, the following should be considered:

Professional Counselor Identity

CACREP-accredited programs must market themselves in a manner that clearly identifies them as counseling programs, as prescribed in Policy A.2.a. Specialized practice area program names and descriptions should promote the counseling specialized practice area first and the concentration or emphasis area second. Websites and other institutional media must clearly identify the program in relation to the CACREP specialized practice area.

- *For example, if an institution has an accredited CMHC specialized practice area with an optional concentration or emphasis area in Art Therapy, the program should be advertised and marketed as a CMHC specialized practice area. Promotional materials and media should use a program title of Clinical Mental Health Counseling and only after that identify the concentration area (e.g., M.A. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, with a concentration in Art Therapy).*

Course Prefixes, Titles, and Content

Also as prescribed in Policy A.2.a., CACREP-accredited programs should ensure that a professional counselor identity is reflected in course prefixes, titles, and content. Institutional guidelines might limit flexibility, but programs should advocate when possible.

- *Course titles should clearly convey the primary program (i.e., counseling) rather than the supplemental concentration. For example, programs that include concentrations in Art Therapy should use care to ensure that course titles emphasize the application of Art Therapy concepts and techniques in the practice of counseling, rather than stand-alone emphases on Art Therapy as a discipline and program identity.*
- *A school counseling program housed in a college of education could advocate for course prefixes related to counseling (e.g., COUN) versus education (e.g., EDU) to help identify the courses as counseling courses.*
- *The title of a course shared by students in Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling programs and Marriage and Family Therapy programs should reflect counseling. For example, the course title Theories of Family and Couple Counseling and Therapy would capture both professions while clearly indicating counseling content is covered.*

Credentials and Engagement

As prescribed by Standard 1.Z., core program faculty must demonstrate a counselor identity via professional counseling credentials and engagement with professional activities in counseling.

- *For example, a faculty member with a doctoral degree in counselor education is teaching in a counseling specialized practice area that includes a concentration or emphasis area in trauma studies. They maintain a counseling license. For the past 7 years they have attended conferences specific to trauma and published in interdisciplinary journals but have not attended any counseling conferences or published in any counseling journals. The lack of engagement in professional activities in counseling (e.g., does not attend counseling conferences or publish in counseling journals) suggests this individual would not meet the criteria for core counseling program faculty.*

Accurate and Clear Communication of Accreditation Status

CACREP accredits eight entry-level counseling specialized practice areas and doctoral programs.

CACREP does not review or accredit concentration/emphasis area content or program options. **CACREP**

Policy C.2. notes that institutions (and any persons acting on an institution's or program's behalf)

must ensure accuracy when publicizing a program’s CACREP-accredited status. CACREP Policy A.2.b. also speaks to programs’ responsibilities not to create misrepresentation with regard to CACREP accreditation. To address these requirements and responsibilities for degree programs that include concentration/emphasis area content or program options, the following language is suggested:

- *XYZ University offers a master’s degree in the CACREP-accredited specialized practice area of Clinical Mental Health Counseling. As part of that program students may complete an emphasis in either Addiction Counseling or Pastoral Counseling. Content in the emphasis area does not fall under the scope of CACREP-accreditation and is not reviewed by CACREP.*

Admission to the Program

No matter which concentration or emphasis area students seek within any given specialized practice area, the standards for admission to the CACREP-accredited specialized practice area must be uniformly applied to all applicants.

- *For example, if an institution has an accredited CMHC specialized practice area with an optional concentration in Pastoral Counseling, applicants to the CMHC specialized practice area with a concentration in Pastoral Counseling should not be held to different admissions standards than applicants to the CMHC specialized practice area with no concentration.*